

Mentoring Needs and Solutions in the State of Kansas

The following is a column by Coach Bill Snyder, chair of the Kansas Mentors Council and Leadership Council.

“Surround yourself with caring people who want to, can, and will make your life better.” Those are the words I’ve constantly shared with the young people of our football program, our state and across the nation. Therein lies the direction of Kansas mentors: to assist in providing a caring adult to each young Kansan who needs guidance, knowledge and a positive role model.

In order for this to happen it will require a grassroots, unified effort from the caring citizens of our state. We are not starting from scratch, as we have a substantial number of effective mentoring services in Kansas. Our major problem is manpower.

I have been impressed by the countless number of mentoring programs and individual citizens who have a desire to help. This has shed light on the need for community members to realize the existing mentoring programs. It is important that individuals know the opportunities for mentoring that exist within their communities so that they may respond. Many of these mentoring organizations are registered on our Web site (www.ksmentors.ks.gov). We hope that those not registered will do so.

I recently became aware of a community which, though a school district’s assistance, has developed a program that provides a mentor for every high school student. It makes sense to me that our school districts reach out to all potential mentees and mentors. Although state funding for mentoring development can not be directed to school systems, we continue to encourage each school district throughout the state to help bridge the gap in their communities between needed mentors and young people in need of mentoring assistance. A good start to encourage participation is:

- 1.) Register all known mentoring programs with our web site
- 2.) Volunteer your mentoring help to a local mentoring program
- 3.) Inquire with your community school district about school based mentoring

We’ve requested that each school district superintendent identify existing mentoring programs within their communities for registration on our Web site and soon hope to provide them with model programs which they might consider implementing within their districts. In many communities throughout the state a mentor program may not exist, in which case there may be only three meaningful solutions: a.) expand existing programs from near by communities; b.) create new mentoring organizations; or c.) develop programs and mentoring through the efforts of the local school system. Each choice requires the community leadership to believe in the need for youth mentoring and get involved.

The need for additional mentors is especially prevalent in urban areas. More local citizens must become aware of the need and get involved with an existing local mentoring program. Which begs the question; how do we make the population aware of these existing needs? Media could truly enhance this with public service announcements on a regular basis, as could the education and faith based organizations, by sharing the vital information with their constituency. The assistance of each of these entities will be vital in “getting the word out” and attracting potential caring and capable mentors to mentoring organizations.

Under the direction of Governor Sebelius, we have formed a statewide Kansas Mentors Leadership Council, composed of talented and caring leaders who work to make a difference in the lives of youth. This council, in addition to our Web site, a sound and proven tool kit of the principles and practices of effective mentoring, is presently undertaking all of the above mentioned concerns and attempting to bring solutions into actions.

The bottom line remains; those who have achieved successes in their lives have done so because they have had someone in their lives who has served in that position of influence, guidance, caring and direction. It is my belief that Kansas is comprised of people who genuinely care about our youth and the value based direction they take in life. You are out there and you are desperately needed. Please get involved through a nearby mentoring agency.

Coach Bill Snyder